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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 002479

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: AUSTRALIA HIGH COMMISSION LABELS FM'S VISIT A
SUCCESS, HAILS STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH INDIA

Classified By: Political Counselor Ted Osius for reasons 1.4(B and D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: While Indian media coverage of Foreign Minister Stephen Smith's visit to New Delhi focused overwhelmingly on Australia's decision not to provide uranium to India, the Australian High Commission focused on atmospherics and labeled the visit a success. The Government of Australia feels that despite the uranium decision, its positive role at the Nuclear Suppliers Group and International Atomic Energy Agency meetings that approved an India-specific waiver and safeguards agreement has been well received by New Delhi. Australia and India announced in a joint statement that they will form a strategic partnership in the near future, demonstrating that India has moved into a front-line position in Australian foreign policy. Smith visited Chennai and Hyderabad as well as New Delhi, emphasizing Australia's special interest in Southern India.
END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Australian Foreign Minister Stephen Smith visited India for the first time September 8-12. Australian High Commission Political Officer Murray Harris told Poloffs that the Government of Australia considers Smith's visit a success, primarily for the high-level reception given to Smith, including meetings with PM Singh and other high-ranking officials in Delhi. Smith had a lengthy meeting with Prime Minister Singh, with a dinner afterward. Smith's meeting with External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee was also substantive, covering the many areas of agreement in the two country's growing relationship. Harris emphasized that because Mukherjee visited Australia just a few months ago, this visit was not about deliverables but about putting the Australia-India relationship "on the front line," and noted that Australia and India had agreed to transform relations to a "strategic partnership."

¶3. (SBU) In a joint statement released after Smith's visit, emphasis was on the areas in which the Australia-India relationship is growing. The statement announced the two governments' intention to complete a feasibility study on a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) by the end of the year, and expressed satisfaction over a recent MOU between the two countries on cooperation in the field of water management and establishment of a joint working group on passports, visas and consular matters. FM Smith also took the opportunity of his visit to reiterate Australia's support for India's membership of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and for India's inclusion as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). (NOTE: full text of the joint statement can be found at

¶14. (C) Indian Media coverage fixated on Australia's decision not to supply uranium to India at the expense of other topics covered during the visit. However, Harris indicated that the issue did not come up directly in Smith's meetings, and that Australia's role at the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) seems to have gone over well in New Delhi.

¶15. (C) Harris noted that Smith's successful visits to Chennai and Hyderabad were of great importance to Australia, with Smith noting that "Perth is closer to Chennai than Sydney is to Seoul." Smith added that Australia feels especially close to the South of India not only geographically, but also because of the economic relationship and "synergy" developing there.

¶16. (C) Harris told Poloffs that Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd will probably visit India in late December to formally inaugurate a "Strategic Partnership." He further noted that Rudd has a special interest in Australia's initiative on Asia Pacific Community (APC). According to the joint statement released after Smith's visit, The Australian PM's Envoy, Steve Woolcott, will visit India later in 2008 for regional consultations on APC.

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